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ABSTRACT

The research reported here, based largely on open-ended interviews with elementary school children at several grade levels, examines the measurement and correlates of gender role flexibility in children. It explores children's conceptions of "mother" and "father" both in response to questioning about the child's own parents and in response to depiction of deliberate reversals of the conventionally stereotyped roles of mother as child caretaker-houskeeper and father as breadwinner. This investigation suggests some methodological innovation and contributes to theoretical clarification of sources and mechanisms of early gender role learning by exploring the impact of the concrete unique example of the child's own parents as gender role models. (Author/YRJ)

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Measurement and Correlates of Flexibility in Children's Gender Role Conceptions*

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Measurement and Correlates of Flexibility

in Children's Gender Role Conceptions

How do children conceptualize "femininity" and "masculinity"? Gender role conceptions and expectations have enormous impact on people's overall life chances and on the everyday detail of their lives, yet existing research on gender roles does little to illuminate their childhood meaning. Numerous studies of feminine and masculine stereotypes are limited by their neglect of salient childhood experience and the children's own perspectives. Other common shortcomings include reliance on research designs that conceptualize masculinity and femininity as unidimensional polar opposites, and designs that require a person to respond to a preselected list of sex-linked stereotypes in terms of predetermined categories.

Common measures of masculinity and femininity in children, such as the toy preference test and stereotype endorsement studies, generally fail to incorporate a recognition that people normally exhibit varying elements of both so-called "masculinity" and "femininity" (Johnson et al. 1974, Constantinople 1973, Bem 1974). The measurement techniques virtually guarantee confirmation of existing stereotypes: Toy preference tests (DeLucia 1972, Ward 1969) are based on artificial forced-choice comparisons of all possible pairs of a set of highly sex-linked toys depicted on cards; stereotype endorsement studies (Williams et al. 1975) are similarly based on a set of strongly sex-linked items to which a child responds in terms of response alternatives provided by the researcher. While these methods may have some utility in measuring the child's awareness of existing stereotypes,

(e.g. as in Williams et al. 1975), they tell us very little about the nature and relevance of gender role conceptions in the child's everyday life.

If we are to learn more about the actual content and acquisition process of these conceptions, then we need to go beyond the prevailing ways of investigating gender role stereotypes by developing more valid and useful methodologies that permit children to freely elaborate their personal impressions of masculinity and femininity without the constraints imposed by the typical data collection techniques. Similarly, recent research documenting the existence of unrealistically stereotyped gender roles, particularly in children's books (Weitzman et al. 1972, U'Ren 1971, Women on Words and Images 1972), should now be extended to examine how children actually react to such depicted stereotypes, and how their responses may vary by sex, age, family characteristics and other factors.

The research reported here, based on largely open-ended interviews with elementary school children at several grade levels, examines the measurement and correlates of gender role flexibility in children. Based on a conceptualization of masculinity and femininity as independent dimensions, the research design permits free elaboration by the children of their gender role conceptions. This paper explores children's conceptions of "mother" and "father" both in response to questioning about the child's own parents and in response to depiction of deliberate reversals of the conventionally stereotyped roles of mother as child caretaker-housekeeper and father as breadwinner. Relative flexibility in the gender role aspects of children's parental conceptions is then related to age, sex, parental employment and the children's perceptions of parental activities within the home. This

examination of the actual content and correlates of children's own conceptions and assessments of gender roles is important because it focuses on a key link in the process by which early experience comes to affect later life gender role attitudes and behavior. This investigation suggests some methodological innovations and contributes to theoretical clarification of sources and mechanisms of early gender role learning by exploring the impact of the concrete, unique example of the child's own parents as gender role models.

HYPOTHESES

The effect of age

The few studies of children's gender role conceptions that systematically compare children of different ages (Hartley, n.d., 1964, Brun Gulbrandsen 1971) find that children approaching their teens are notably more opinionated and rigid in their conceptions of "masculine" and "feminine" than children in early primary grades. These empirical findings are consistent with major theoretical orientations on gender role acquisition (Kohlberg 1966, Mischel 1966, Lynn 1969), all of which imply a positive association of age with more complex, well-defined, and possibly more rigid notions about sex-appropriate behavior.

The effect of sex

Predictions about sex differences are complex, since they involve potential differences between male and female children in their conceptions of "masculine" and "feminine" as well as interactions between the child's sex and the child's sex-specific conceptions. Theories on gender role acquisition have not been refined to the point of specifying such differences and

interactions. Hypotheses of sex differences in the present study, i.e., male v. female children's conceptions of male v. female adult roles, are also complicated by the recognition that standards of sex-appropriate behavior vary by age, both because these standards differ for persons of various ages and because normative sophistication is itself age-related. While much research (Biller & Borstelmann 1967, Fling & Manosevitz 1972, Hartley 1959, Stoll 1974) suggests that pressures for sex-appropriate behavior are stronger and more consistently applied for young boys than for young girls, and that such pressures become relatively stronger at puberty for girls, theoretically-oriented work generally fails to specify the relationship between a child's personal gender role learning and the child's conceptions of gender role aspects of adult behavior. Thus, sex difference hypotheses generated from theories of gender role acquisition are most directly applicable to children's notions about peer behavior, rather than adult behavior, e.g. "sissies" will be judged more harshly than "tomboys." It may not follow that adult male sex-atypical behavior is more harshly judged than adult female sex atypical behavior.

Rather than basing predictions simply on the likelihood that sex atypical behavior will be harshly judged, it makes sense to identify the specific features of reverse-stereotyped behavior. One can distinguish for both so-called "feminine" and so-called "masculine" characteristics certain features that are positively valued and others that are negatively valued (Johnson et al. 1974). Hypotheses for the present study are based on the assumption that for younger children of both sexes, the social value of sex-atypical behavior will be more salient than the sex-atypicality per se. Since the parental role reversals in this study are limited to the depiction of

positively-valued behaviors (mother exhibiting positively-valued "masculine" behavior and father exhibiting positively-valued "feminine" behavior), sex differences of any sort are not expected.

The effect of family characteristics

Empirical studies on both children and adults have generally found a positive relationship between socioeconomic status and more flexible standards of sex appropriateness (Hartley 1960, n.d., Komarovsky 1962, Balswick & Peek 1970). Some studies have also found positive associations between maternal employment and the flexibility of children's gender role conceptions, particularly regarding women's employment (Hoffman & Nye 1974, Hartley 1964). In her review of numerous studies on the effects of maternal employment, Etaugh (1974) finds that, compared to children of housewives, children of employed mothers tend to perceive smaller differences between male and female "roles."

Although researchers have explored how husbands and wives divide household and child care responsibilities, most of the studies are only indirectly relevant to present aims, since they focus on power and decision making aspects of the conjugal relationship rather than on the impact of parental household activities upon children. Findings suggest that husband's participation in general household work is more extensive when the wife is employed and more extensive among middle to upper class families (Bahr 1974, Poloma & Garland 1971, Holmstrom 1972, Haavio-Mannila 1967, Hoffman 1960, Etaugh 1974). The studies which consider effects of such parental activity on children's gender role conceptions (Landreth 1963, Hartley n.d.) suggest that children tend to pattern their ideas of sex-appropriateness on parental behavior

they observe. It seems reasonable to infer that extensive, active paternal participation in housework and child care should contribute to broader, more flexible gender role conceptions on the part of children in the family. Since socioeconomic status and maternal employment are both positively related to greater paternal household participation, these variables are expected to influence children's gender role conceptions in part by way of their influence on the actual household division of labor observed by the child.

METHOD

Preliminary fieldwork, including observation and unstructured interviewing of children in school, recreational and familial settings, revealed serious limitations of direct questioning as a means of investigating the content of children's gender role conceptions. Parental roles are such taken-for-granted, integral parts of everyday family life that children respond to direct questioning with vague generalities (e.g. "Mothers take care of children") which never touch on the crucial boundaries for sex-appropriate behavior, or the extent of flexibility they accord the sex-typing of a given role. For example, while it may be that mothers take care of children, is this something that fathers do also? Under the same conditions and in the same ways as mothers? Data bearing on these questions are not obtained by direct questioning, nor by conventional stereotype endorsement studies whose forced choice designs with highly stereotyped items virtually guarantee confirmation of gender role stereotypes but provide no sound basis for inference about the meaning and importance of such stereotypes in the child's life. With these considerations in mind, a deliberate role reversal stimulus technique

coupled with extensive open-ended interviewing, was devised as a more effective means of gathering data than direct questioning or stereotype endorsement.

Data consist of twenty-five minute tape-recorded individual interviews with eighty-four children from three grade levels (kindergarten, second, fifth) in a medium-sized Midwestern community. One rural and one urban school were purposefully selected to ensure ample variation in the children's socioeconomic backgrounds. In the absence of access to detailed information on parental education and income, the variables "mother's employment" and "father's employment" were based on parental occupation(s) which were recorded from school enrollment forms and verified by interviews with the teachers and the children, and when necessary for clarification, with the parents themselves. Professional, managerial and miscellaneous occupations requiring college education were classified "high status" and all other occupations were classified "low status." All fathers were employed and nearly half the mothers were employed. The employed mothers held full-time jobs with only a few exceptions consisting of women who were employed one-half or three-quarters time.

Within each school, at each of the three grade levels, equal numbers of boys and girls were randomly selected from those children meeting the requirements of having both parents present in the home and having at least one opposite sex sibling (in order to maximize potential cross-sex exposure in the home and thus provide a more stringent test of hypotheses).[1]

Measurement of gender role flexibility

The first part of the interview elicited the child's reactions to the gender role reversal booklet pictured in Figure 1. This story portrays routine family life in a manner which was deliberately simplified in order to focus children's attention on the systematic reversals of conventional gender

Figure 1 about here

role stereotypes of "mother" and "father." Children's responses to the role reversal booklet, coded[2] to incorporate evaluative judgments, were used to construct the gender role flexibility indexes for each storybook character and one average or "overall" index. This paper considers only the storybook MOTHER INDEX and the storybook FATHER INDEX. The MOTHER INDEX and FATHER INDEX are each scored as follows:

"No response" = NO RECOGNITION of sex-atypical behavior. The child does not explicitly identify aspects of the reversal as sex atypical.

"Neutral" = NO EVALUATION of sex atypical behavior. Explicit but non-evaluative identification of aspects of the reversal as sex-atypical.

"Flexible" = APPROVAL of sex atypical behavior. Comments on explicitly identified aspects of sex atypical behavior show approval. (If disapproving comments are also made, approving ones clearly outweigh.)

"Conventional" = DISAPPROVAL of sex atypical behavior. Comments on explicitly identified aspects of sex atypicality show disapproval. (If approving comments are also made, disapproving ones clearly outweigh.)

"Balanced" = BALANCED assessment of sex atypical behavior. Evaluative comments are equally approving and disapproving.

Ninety percent of children make evaluative comments on gender role aspects of the storybook during at least some portions of the interview.

These children's responses are classified by extent of correspondence with prevailing "conventional" gender role stereotypes. Children's responses that criticize the reversals (whether directly, by disapproving of the depicted reversals, or indirectly, by praising conventional gender role characteristics or behavior not depicted) are classified "conventional" since they uphold conventional standards of sex-appropriateness. In contrast, children's responses that praise the depicted role reversals (again, whether directly, or indirectly by praising other sex atypical characteristics or behavior not depicted) are termed "flexible."

Recognition and interpretation of responses classified "no response," "neutral," and "conventional" are straightforward. A response such as "The father stays home with the children" is classified "no response" since it has no normative connotations. The response, "Usually the father goes to work," is "neutral" because it identifies the activity depicted as unusual but it is not an unequivocal evaluative judgment. On the other hand, the response, "My family's different 'cause my daddy goes to work and that's what daddies should do!" is "conventional" because it shows disapproval of the role reversal.

Recognition of "flexible" (approving) responses is straightforward, but the interpretation is less clear. Praise of the sex-atypical behavior depicted does not in itself imply rejection of conventional patterns; it may instead indicate a broader, more flexible conception of sex-appropriateness standards. The term "flexible" is used in preference to "non-conventional" to emphasize this interpretive caution.

The most difficult problems of interpretation are associated with the so-called "balanced" category used for remarks which overall are equally

conventional (disapproving) and flexible (approving). "Balanced" answers are far more prevalent among older children, and they often represent a relatively sophisticated assessment of pros and cons. The "balanced" categorization is used only when the child expresses evenly mixed personal assessments of the sex atypical behavior. When a child clearly differentiates "other people's views" in opposition to personal views, the response is scored according to the child's own views. For example a fifth grader explains that, "Most people think that women shouldn't go to work, or that both the man and the woman should go to work, but I like the idea that she goes to work and he stays home." Although a balanced view is presented, the part this child attributes to herself is clearly "flexible" so the response is scored "flexible."

LOG-LINEAR ANALYSIS

Age and sex differences

Table 1 shows percentage distributions of the MOTHER INDEX and the FATHER INDEX, respectively, by age-sex categories with separate subtotals for age and sex. Age is a dichotomy, where "young" refers to the combined category of kindergarteners and second graders and "old" refers to the fifth graders.[3]

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Table 1 about here

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There are several consistent age differences in the children's response patterns on both indexes. "No response" occurs only among the young children

and "balanced" responses occur more frequently among the older children, especially the older males. Consistent with theoretically and empirically based predictions, the most striking differences are the age reversals on the "flexible" and "conventional" categories, showing older children to be simultaneously less flexible and more conventional than younger children on both the MOTHER INDEX and the FATHER INDEX.

Although patterns of sex differences on the indexes are not so obvious and consistent as patterns of age differences, the subtotal percentages on sex for the FATHER INDEX show that, among the older children, girls are less tolerant (simultaneously more conventional and less flexible) than boys of sex atypical paternal behavior. Young males show greater approval of the father reversal than any other sex-age category.

Log-linear techniques (Goodman 1969, 1972) for the analysis of multivariate contingency tables provide a means to test the significance of main and interactive effects of these key variables, sex and age, and of the other variables included in this paper. Table 2 summarizes the results of log-linear analysis of the data in Table 1. The baseline model for each index, shown in the top panel of the table, specifies the association between sex and age plus the independent main effects on the index of age and of sex. For each of two subsequent models (not shown), one of the main effect parameters is omitted. Statistical comparison of the baseline model and each model omitting a given main effect parameter permits inference about the net significance of each omitted main effect. The bottom panel of the table shows that younger children are significantly more flexible than older ones regarding gender role aspects of both mother's behavior and father's behavior. Sex has a significant net effect for the FATHER

INDEX only; boys are more tolerant than girls of paternal sex atypical behavior.

Family characteristics and gender role flexibility

Interview data on children's perceptions of each parent's housekeeping and child care attitudes and participation were used to construct the variable, parental household "division of labor," which measures the extent of male participation in routine, everyday household chores normatively assigned to the female (Bahr 1974). Division of labor is a dichotomy, where "rigid" (44%, n=36) indicates very limited paternal participation and "shared" (56%, n=46) indicates paternal participation on a routine basis. "Rigid" division of labor indicates that the father helps with routine household responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning and child care infrequently, and only under unusual conditions, such as when the mother is ill or absent. "Shared" division of labor indicates that the father shares these responsibilities with the mother on a regular basis. Any discrepancy between the child's perception and the actual parental division of chores is irrelevant to present purposes, as it is assumed that the child's own perception influences the child's other attitudes, including relative gender role flexibility.

Table 3 shows the percentage distributions of the two indexes by division of labor. Division of labor shows a statistically significant zero-order association in the predicted direction with both the MOTHER INDEX and the FATHER INDEX.

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Table 3 about here

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Based on the data shown in Table 4, the next portion of log-linear analysis,[4] reported in Table 5, tests the significance of net effects on the indexes of the variables age, sex, and division of labor. A simplified baseline model is presented in Table 5 since preliminary analysis showed that higher order effects were not statistically significant. The baseline model therefore specifies the three-way interaction among sex, age and division of labor, plus the independent main effects on the index of age, sex and division of labor. Results for the MOTHER INDEX show a significant effect of division of labor, borderline significance for age and non-significance for sex. Results for the FATHER INDEX show significant effects for division of labor and age, and non-significance for sex.

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Tables 4 & 5 about here

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The next part of the analysis investigates the predicted relationships among the family characteristics. The percentage distribution of division of labor by parental employment statuses is shown in Table 6; results of the log-linear analysis are shown in Table 7. Both tables show breakdowns for the total sample and, to permit comparisons, for the two special subsamples used in other parts of the analysis (i.e., subsamples of children scoring either "flexible" or "conventional" on the MOTHER INDEX and FATHER INDEX respectively; cf. footnote 4). Inspection of percentages in Table 6 suggests a consistent relationship between father's employment status and division of labor for high status fathers only; overall, there is a significant association between father's employment status and division of labor in the total sample but not in either subsample. Although high

maternal employment status appears to be strongly related to shared division of labor when paternal employment status is also high, there is no overall significant relationship between mother's employment status and division of labor in any of the three samples.

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Tables 6 & 7 about here

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Contrary to expectations, then, parental employment statuses were not consistently related to division of labor. It may be, however, that parental employment statuses exert independent influences on gender role flexibility. The final part of the analysis considers the effects of parental employment statuses and division of labor on each of the gender role flexibility indexes. As shown in Table 8, mother's employment status has no zero-order relationship with either the MOTHER INDEX or the FATHER INDEX. Since father's employment status and division of labor were shown to be related (at least in the total sample), these two variables are analyzed for their respective net effects on each index. Table 9 shows the percentage distribution of these variables and Table 10 summarizes the results of the log-linear analysis. Division of labor is significant for both indexes, but father's employment status is not significant for either index.

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Tables 8, 9 & 10 about here

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Summary of Results

Significant associations with the gender role flexibility indexes were reported for division of labor and age. Division of labor was significant net of age and sex, and also net of father's employment status. Age was significant net of sex and division of labor. Sex differences were equivocal: There was a zero order relationship between sex and the FATHER INDEX, but sex was non-signiticant net of age and division of labor. Non-significance was reported for mother's employment status and for father's employment status (net of division of labor).

DISCUSSION: SUPPLEMENTARY EVIDENCE FROM INTERVIEWS

Developmental considerations

Analysis reported here shows that older children are significantly less approving than younger ones of atypical gender role behavior on the part of parents. Examination of interview transcripts reveals age differences in the content and complexity of responses. Younger children often respond to the interview with a brief synopsis of the story coupled with approval of storybook characters as nice or helpful:

> (The father) was nice too. He was nice because he helped the mother, served the supper....and he's nice to the children and he lets 'em go outside and play.

In contrast, older children are more likely to embellish the story and give a more detailed evaluation than simple approval or disapproval:

> Well, the father had a pretty hard job, he hadda keep the baby clean, you know, he hadda change her diapers and everything, you know, the father would not normally do that. It comes natural for a mother....

Inspection of interview transcripts shows several other basic age differences in the content of responses to the reversals. Compared to the younger children, the fifth graders are far less likely to mention personality attributes or physical characteristics of the storybook characters, and they are far more likely to make explicit normative comments. Older children are also far more likely to spontaneously provide some explanation for perceived incongruity of the reversals, i.e. in Garfinkel's terms (1967) they are more likely to "normalize." For example, normalizations for why the storybook mother works include the following:

> 'cause the father must'a knew more about cooking than she did and she might have know a little more about whatever she did.
>
> ...if the father's having a hard time finding a job and the mother has a good job making a lot of money they could do it that way.
>
> The father might be sick.
>
> The husband might like to work with the children better than a job.

Normalizations are significantly related to age: Two-thirds of the older children compared to one-seventh of the younger ones spontaneously offered some explanation or justification for the role reversal. It should be noted that normalization by no means presumes a negative judgment or even a discernible evaluation. Normalization shows comprehension of norms and reasoning ability in action; it becomes more frequent and more sophisticated with age.

Compared to the younger children, fifth graders have had considerably more exposure to gender role socialization from a variety of family, peer, school and mass media agents. Fifth graders have also had more

practice with question and answer situations, making evaluations and other skills that lead to more sophisticated performance in an interview situation. Thus, fifth graders more frequently noted the parental role reversals, more frequently judged them, and more frequently expressed a mixed assessment rather than unqualified approval or disapproval. The frequency of spontaneous normalizations suggests that fifth graders both have a good grasp of the gender role stereotypes associated with parental roles and have the ability to deal rather routinely with such normative exceptions as a caretaking father.

Analysis of interview transcripts shows that, compared to the older children, the younger ones are more strongly and more directly influenced by personal family experience in their reactions to the parental role reversals. For example, many of the kindergarteners and second graders explained their judgments of the storybook mother and father by direct reference to their own parents: "The storybook mother likes her job because my mommy likes her job." In contrast, a general normative perspective often transcends personal family experience in the responses by fifth graders. For example, a number of fifth grade children of employed mothers expressed their disapproval of the storybook mother with the observation, "She shouldn't do that. Mothers don't work."

Parental household division of labor

The log-linear analysis indicates that a child's perception of paternal participation in housework and child care is strongly related to the flexibility of the child's conceptions of parental roles. Parental division of labor, while influenced by socioeconomic status and parental employment,

is unique in its provision of an on-going example for the child of adult male-female interaction. It is consistent with interactionist and social learning perspectives that the "at home" roles of the child's own parents should be particularly salient to the development of the child's gender role conceptions.

Interview data which show certain age and sex differences in the child's impressions of parental behavior and attitudes help clarify the link between division of labor and children's gender role conceptions. While the net effect of sex was not significant in the log linear analysis, the subsample used in that portion of analysis does not reflect the association between sex and division of labor found in the overall sample. That is, for the sample as a whole, there are sex but not age differences in the children's perceptions of division of labor: males (76%) are much more likely than females (40%) to perceive "shared" rather than "rigid" division of labor. The difference is particularly large among the fifth graders, where 82% of the males compared to 35% of the females view parental division of labor as "shared."

It is possible that fathers spend more time with male children; interview transcript comparisons of boys' and girls' comments suggest this is so. It may be that boys are encouraged more than girls to assist their fathers in household chores, which may in turn heighten the salience for boys of their father's household activities. In other words, to the extent that sex differences in children's household participation parallel an adult sex-typed division of labor, children may be selectively perceptive to the relative contribution of the same sex parent--implying that males more than females should view their fathers as participating extensively

in housework. Such selective perception might be stronger for older children because of their greater capacity to actively assist. Consistent with this argument is the pronounced tendency of fifth grade males, more than any other sex-age category, to view division of labor as shared.

Interview data also show certain differential responses to the storybook mother and father, suggesting the need to distinguish various sex-linked behaviors and attributes which may be relatively independent. Children's responses suggest in particular that occupational roles, child care and housework behavior, and sex-linked personality attributes should be carefully distinguished. For example, in contrast to consensus that the mother likes her job, only two-thirds of the children stated unequivocally that the father likes what he does. The children perceived more disagreeable aspects of the father's reversed role than they did of the mother's reversed role, in spite of their strong positive reaction to the father's child care activities. It appears that children are reacting to two things: the disagreeable nature of housework per se and the gender role reversal aspects. A number of children who thought that the father disliked housework claimed that he probably disliked it for the same reasons the child said his or her mother and/or father did: dull, hard, boring, never-ending, "yuckky hands in the dishwater." But comments such as the following were more typical:

> a) He knows he hasta do it so he does it, and the reason why he doesn't like it is 'cause he'd rather go to work I would think. Work at a plant or something, cause it's not a man's kinda style, you know, feeding babies and take care of babies watchin' little kids and makin' lunch--it's not a man's style.
>
> b) I don't know if he does, but I know my dad wouldn't!

Among those who were negative, girls were as vigorous as boys in reacting against the father doing what they called "woman's work."

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Certain ambiguities in the interpretation of gender role flexibility emphasize the need to distinguish reactions to depicted sex atypical behaviors per se (e.g. father feeds baby) from reactions to the activities qua reversals (father rather than mother feeds baby). While the stereotype reversal technique is very useful for exploratory research, it may preclude consistent determination of such distinctions, especially among very young children and less verbal older children. Ambiguity could be further reduced by research directed at more precise isolation of specific aspects of sex atypical behavior most likely to elicit either approval or disapproval (cf. Johnson et al. 1974).

Findings also suggest a need for finer distinctions and conceptual clarification in the measurement of children's impressions of parental division of labor. Various components of housework and child care should be identified so that their differential degree of sex typing and differential general appeal can be taken into account.

It would be interesting to compare children's reactions to a booklet which shows both parents leaving for work in the morning, and both sharing child care and housework in a manner unrelated to stereotyped gender roles. While findings in this study are highly suggestive, it would be desirable to elicit responses from a larger sample of children exposed to several different versions of parental role portrayals. Such a study could

be designed to differentiate between "shock" reaction to the reversal and highly conventional responses. It might also differentiate between neutral responses that indicate lack of opinion and neutral responses that indicate easy acceptance of the stereotype reversals.

Finally, many children who express clear and definite ideas about how males and females should act go on to describe with matter of fact acceptance a number of exceptions (sometimes including their own behavior) to these sex-appropriateness standards. Clearly, investigations of children's gender role conceptions must carefully distinguish the tendency of children to respond more critically in the abstract (e.g., "daddies shouldn't be home like that") than to concrete examples (e.g. "he's nice because he's feeding the baby"). Inferences about real life consequences which are based solely on children's recognition or endorsement of stereotyped standards of sex appropriate behavior are likely to underestimate the actual range of acceptable behaviors.

CONCLUSION

Significant age differences in gender role flexibility as measured by reactions to the stereotype reversal storybook indicate that fifth graders have less flexible gender role conceptions than kindergarteners and second graders. These age differences are attributed both to more extensive gender role socialization and to simple maturation. The finding that age differences are pronounced between younger children and the fifth graders, but not between the kindergarteners and second graders, suggests that important gender role learning takes place between second and fifth grade.

Sex differences in gender role flexibility were more complex and less consistent than age differences. While the net effect of sex was not significant in the log-linear analysis, certain sex-linked relationships (particularly sex-age interactions) that were noted suggest a need for more extensive exploration of sex differences in the nature and degree of acceptance of sex atypical behavior.

The importance of father's and mother's employment statuses as influences upon the child's conceptions of sex-appropriate behavior for children and parents is stressed in the literature but was not, for the most part, supported by this analysis. The major finding of a strong relationship between child's perception of parental household division of labor and the child's gender role flexibility suggests in any case that we should look further than the status ranking of the family and the mere presence or absence of maternal employment if we wish to explain variation in gender role conceptions. Household division of labor is an indicator of the child's own perceptions of how his or her mother and father handle the basic, everyday chores associated with family life--activities which influence the child's own life in complex ways. The child is intimately involved with aspects of the household division of labor by virtue of family membership, while external circumstance severely limits a child's first hand knowledge about either parent's work. The fact that a mother is employed or not may have ramifications upon the household division of labor, but does not in and of itself provide the child with an on-going example of both obvious and subtle ways in which men and women interact. In contrast, the child is a direct, intimately involved observer of many routine family activities which place parents in interrelationships where gender role differences may

be highlighted. The child's perception of the household division of labor thus seems to be a promising variable for the investigation of children's gender role perceptions, both for its direct effects as an ongoing role modeling example for the child, and its indirect effects as a carrier of social class and maternal employment influences.

Footnotes

[1]Several foreign-born children and several children with learning impairments were excluded. All children interviewed were Caucasian. The overall response rate for the final sample was 97% for the rural school and 80% for the urban school. The latter rate was lower because of parental permission refusals unrelated to the content of the study, i.e. the parents did not want their child removed from the classroom because the child would miss lessons. In all, ninety-six children were interviewed. Twelve cases are excluded from data analysis because the interviews were judged to be lower than average quality, mainly due to shyness and frequent non-response.

[2]Inter-coder agreement for these indexes is 86% or better and for all other variables included in the analysis is 93% or better.

[3]A comparison of data analysis using the full trichotomized coding of age with the dichotomous coding showed no significant differences between kindergarteners' and second graders' responses, so a dichotomy is used in this analysis.

[4]Given the statistical desideratum to conserve degrees of freedom for the chi-square test, it is desirable to collapse index categories if this can be accomplished in some substantively meaningful way. While it can be argued that testing of sex and age relationships should be performed on the full coding categories, given that certain age differences involve the "no response" and "neutral" categories, these particular differences seem primarily to be of developmental rather than substantive interest. Another possibility would be to combine the "neutral" category with the "flexible" one, on the grounds that absence of overt disapproval implies implicit approval of the reversal. However, it seems as plausible that "neutral" responses may represent disapproval which the child for some reason is reluctant to express. These considerations imply that age and sex differences should be tested on the subsample of children who actually make evaluative judgments, i.e. the tests should be performed using a trichotomized index ("balanced," "flexible," "conventional"). However, noting the interpretive problems associated with the "balanced" category, the log-linear analysis is restricted to the subsample of index responses that can be clearly identified as either "flexible" or "conventional."

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Table 1. Percentage distributions of MOTHER INDEX and FATHER INDEX by sex by age.

Age	Sex	No Response	Neutral	Balanced	Flexible	Conventional	Total[a]	(n)
MOTHER INDEX:								
Young	Female	11%	14	7	32	36	100%	(28)
	Male	4%	12	12	35	39	102%	(26)
Old	Female	-	18	12	12	59	101%	(17)
	Male	-	8	31	15	46	100%	(13)
SUBTOTALS:	Young	7%	13	9	33	37	99%	(54)
	Old	-	13	20	13	53	99%	(30)
SUBTOTALS:	Female	7%	16	9	24	44	100%	(45)
	Male	3%	10	18	28	41	100%	(39)
TOTALS:		5%	13	13	26	43	100%	(84)
FATHER INDEX:								
Young	Female	11%	11	18	36	25	101%	(28)
	Male	4%	-	12	58	27	101%	(26)
Old	Female	-	12	6	12	71	101%	(17)
	Male	-	-	38	23	38	99%	(13)
SUBTOTALS:	Young	7%	6	15	46	26	100%	(54)
	Old	-	7	20	17	57	101%	(30)
SUBTOTALS:	Female	7%	11	13	27	42	100%	(45)
	Male	3%	-	21	46	31	101%	(39)
TOTALS:		5%	6	17	36	37	101%	(84)

[a] Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table 2. Log-linear analysis of the data in Table 1 (MOTHER INDEX and FATHER INDEX by sex by age).

	MOTHER INDEX chi sq.	d.f.	ps	FATHER INDEX chi sq.	d.f.	ps
BASELINE MODEL:						
Age-sex, Age-index, Sex-index	.525	4	.971	.451	4	.341
PARAMETER:						
Age	9.867	4	.043	13.745	4	.008
Sex	.299	4	.558	10.458	4	.033

Table 3. Percentage distributions of MOTHER & FATHER INDEXES by child's perception of parental household division of labor.[a]

Division of Labor	No Response	Neutral	Balanced	Flexible (approval)	Conventional (disapproval)	Total[b,c]	(N)
A. MOTHER INDEX:[d]							
Shared	2%	9	22	39	28	100%	(46)
Rigid	8%	17	3	11	61	100%	(36)
Total	5%	12	13	27	43	100%	(82)
B. FATHER INDEX:[e]							
Shared	2%	4	24	52	17	99%	(46)
Rigid	8%	8	8	14	61	99%	(36)
Total	5%	6	17	35	37	100%	(82)

[a]Refer to text for definitions of categories.

[b]Two cases are excluded due to non-response on Division of Labor

[c]Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

[d]MOTHER INDEX by division of labor: chi square = 19.05, 4 d.f., $p \leq .0008$.

[e]FATHER INDEX by division of labor: chi square = 23.89, 4 d.f., $p \leq .0001$.

Table 4. Percentage distributions of MOTHER INDEX and FATHER INDEX by age by sex by division of labor.[a]

Age	Sex	Division of Labor	MOTHER INDEX flexible	MOTHER INDEX conventional	MOTHER INDEX Total (n)	FATHER INDEX flexible	FATHER INDEX conventional	FATHER INDEX Total (n)
Young	female	shared	56%	44	100% (9)	75%	25	100% (8)
		rigid	40%	60	100% (10)	44%	56	100% (9)
	male	shared	69%	31	100% (13)	88%	13	101%[b] (16)
		rigid	0%	100	100% (6)	17%	83	100% (6)
Old	female	shared	50%	50	100% (4)	50%	50	100% (4)
		rigid	0%	100	100% (8)	0%	100	100% (10)
	male	shared	40%	60	100% (5)	50%	50	100% (4)
		rigid	0%	100	100% (2)	0%	100	100% (2)

[a]Based on a subsample (for MOTHER INDEX, n=57; for FATHER INDEX, n=59) of children who scored either "flexible" or "conventional" on the index.

[b]Total exceeds 100% due to rounding.

Table 5. Log-linear analysis of the data in Table 4 (MOTHER INDEX and FATHER INDEX by age by sex by division of labor).

	MOTHER INDEX			FATHER INDEX		
	chi sq.	d.f.	ps	chi sq.	d.f.	ps
BASELINE MODEL:						
Age-sex-div. of labor, Age-index, Sex-index, Div. of labor-index	6.662	4	.154	3.450	4	.485
PARAMETER:						
Age	3.496	1	.062	8.380	1.	.004
Sex	.337	1	.561	.044	1	.833
Div. of labor	11.231	1	.001	16.580	1	.001

Table 6. Percentage distribution of parental division of labor by mother's employment status by father's employment status.

Father's Employment	Mother's Employment	TOTAL SAMPLE[a] DIV. OF LABOR shared	rigid	Total	(n)	M.I. SUBSAMPLE[b] DIV. OF LABOR shared	rigid	Total	(n)	F.I. SUBSAMPLE[c] DIV. OF LABOR shared	rigid	Total	(n)
High status	High status	91%	9	100%	(11)	83%	17	100%	(6)	86%	14	100%	(7)
	Low status	67%	33	100%	(6)	67%	33	100%	(6)	80%	20	100%	(5)
	Not employed	64%	36	100%	(22)	50%	50	100%	(14)	53%	47	100%	(15)
Low status	High status	33%	67	100%	(3)	33%	67	100%	(3)	33%	67	100%	(3)
	Low status	39%	61	100%	(18)	50%	50	100%	(12)	46%	54	100%	(13)
	Not employed	45%	55	100%	(22)	50%	50	100%	(16)	44%	56	100%	(16)

[a] N=84: Two cases are excluded due to missing data on division of labor.

[b] N=57: Includes children who scored either "flexible" or "conventional" on the MOTHER INDEX.

[c] N=59: Includes children who scored either "flexible" or "conventional" on the FATHER INDEX.

Table 7. Log-linear analysis of data in Table 6 (Division of labor by mother's employment by father's employment).

	TOTAL SAMPLE[a]			M.I. SUBSAMPLE[b]			F.I. SUBSAMPLE[c]		
	chi sq.	d.f.	ps	chi sq.	d.f.	ps	chi sq.	d.f.	ps
BASELINE MODEL:									
Mother's employment-Father's employment Mother's employment-Division of labor Father's employment-Division of labor	1.904	2	.382	1.844	2	.394	1.823	2	.398
PARAMETER:									
Mother's employment	1.588	1	.448	.657	1	.719	1.241	1	.535
Father's employment	5.006	1	.025	.844	1	.358	2.900	1	.089

[a] N=82: Two cases are excluded due to missing data on division of labor.

[b] N=57: Includes children who scored either "flexible" or "conventional" on the MOTHER INDEX.

[c] N=59: Includes children who scored either "flexible" or "conventional" on the FATHER INDEX.

Table 8. Percentage distributions of MOTHER INDEX and FATHER INDEX by mother's employment status.[a]

Mother's Employment	MOTHER INDEX[b] flexible	conventional	Total	(n)	FATHER INDEX[c] flexible	conventional	Total	(n)
High status	44%	56	100%	(9)	70%	30	100%	(10)
Low status	42%	58	100%	(19)	50%	50	100%	(20)
Not employed	33%	67	100%	(30)	42%	58	100%	(31)

[a]Based on a subsample (for MOTHER INDEX, n=58; for FATHER INDEX, n=61) of children who scored either "flexible" or "conventional" on the index.

[b]MOTHER INDEX by mother's employment status: chi square = .57, 2 d.f., $p \leq .75$.

[c]FATHER INDEX by mother's employment status: chi square = 2.39, 2.d.f., $p \leq .30$.

Table 9. Percentage distributions of MOTHER INDEX and FATHER INDEX by father's employment status by parental division of labor.[a]

Division of Labor	Father's Employment	MOTHER INDEX flex-ible	conven-tional	Total[b]	(n)	FATHER INDEX flex-ible	conven-tional	Total	(n)
Shared	High status	63%	38	101%	(16)	78%	22	100%	(18)
	Low status	53%	47	100%	(15)	71%	29	100%	(14)
Rigid	High status	20%	80	100%	(10)	22%	78	100%	(9)
	Low status	13%	88	101%	(16)	17%	83	100%	(18)

[a]Based on a subsample (for MOTHER INDEX n=57; for FATHER INDEX, n=59) of children who scored either "flexible" or "conventional" on the index. Two cases are excluded due to missing data on division of labor.

[b]Totals may exceed 100% due to rounding.

Table 10. Log-linear analysis of the data in Table 9 (MOTHER INDEX and FATHER INDEX by father's employment status by division of labor).

	MOTHER INDEX			FATHER INDEX		
	chi sq.	d.f.	p≤	chi sq.	d.f.	p≤
BASELINE MODEL:						
Father's employment-Div. of labor Father's employment-Index Division of labor-Index	.019	1	.890	.001	1	.986
PARAMETER:						
Father's employment	.508	1	.476	.288	1	.591
Division of labor	10.894	1	.001	18.152	1	.001

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